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Development  
of the New York  
School System  
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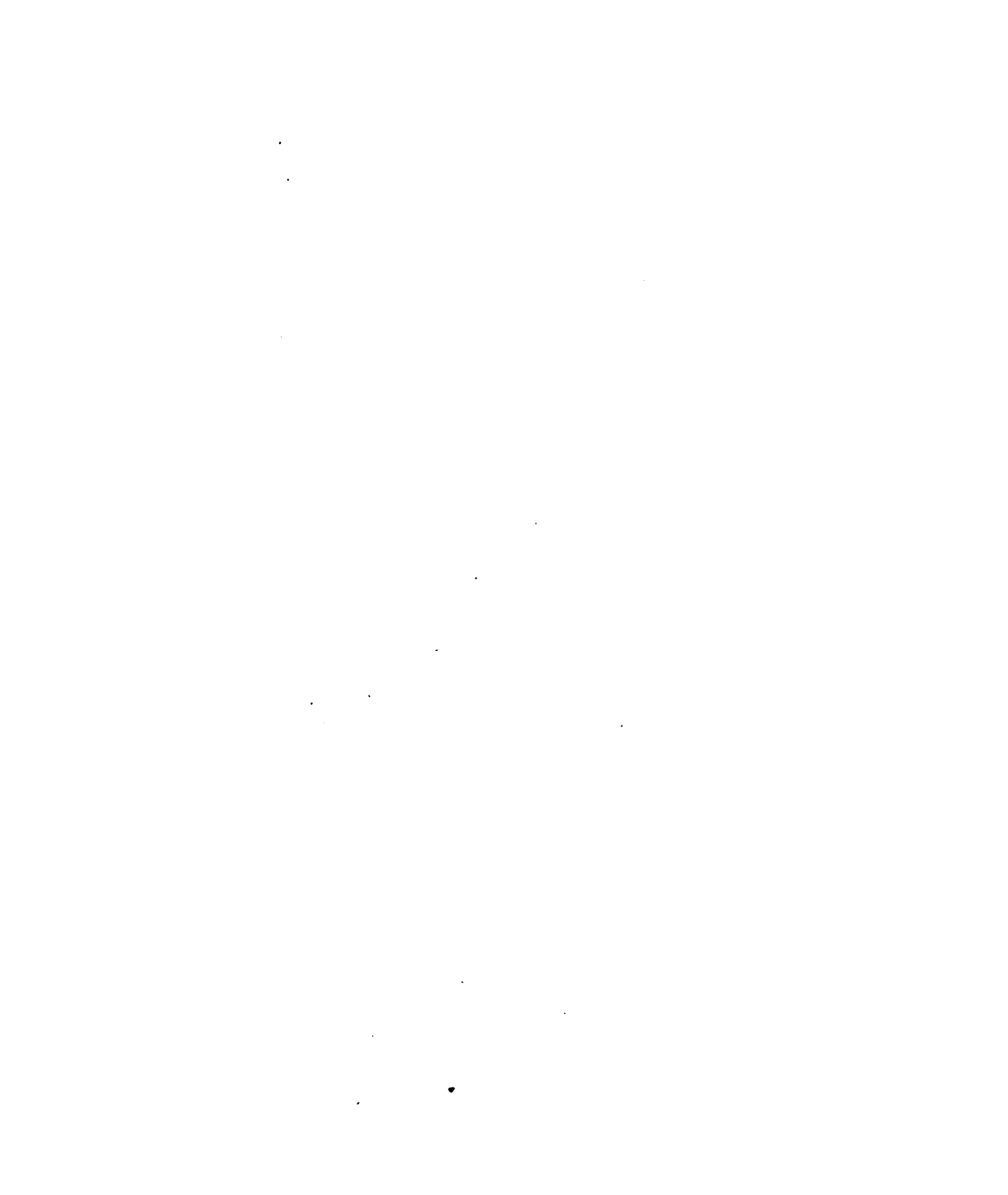
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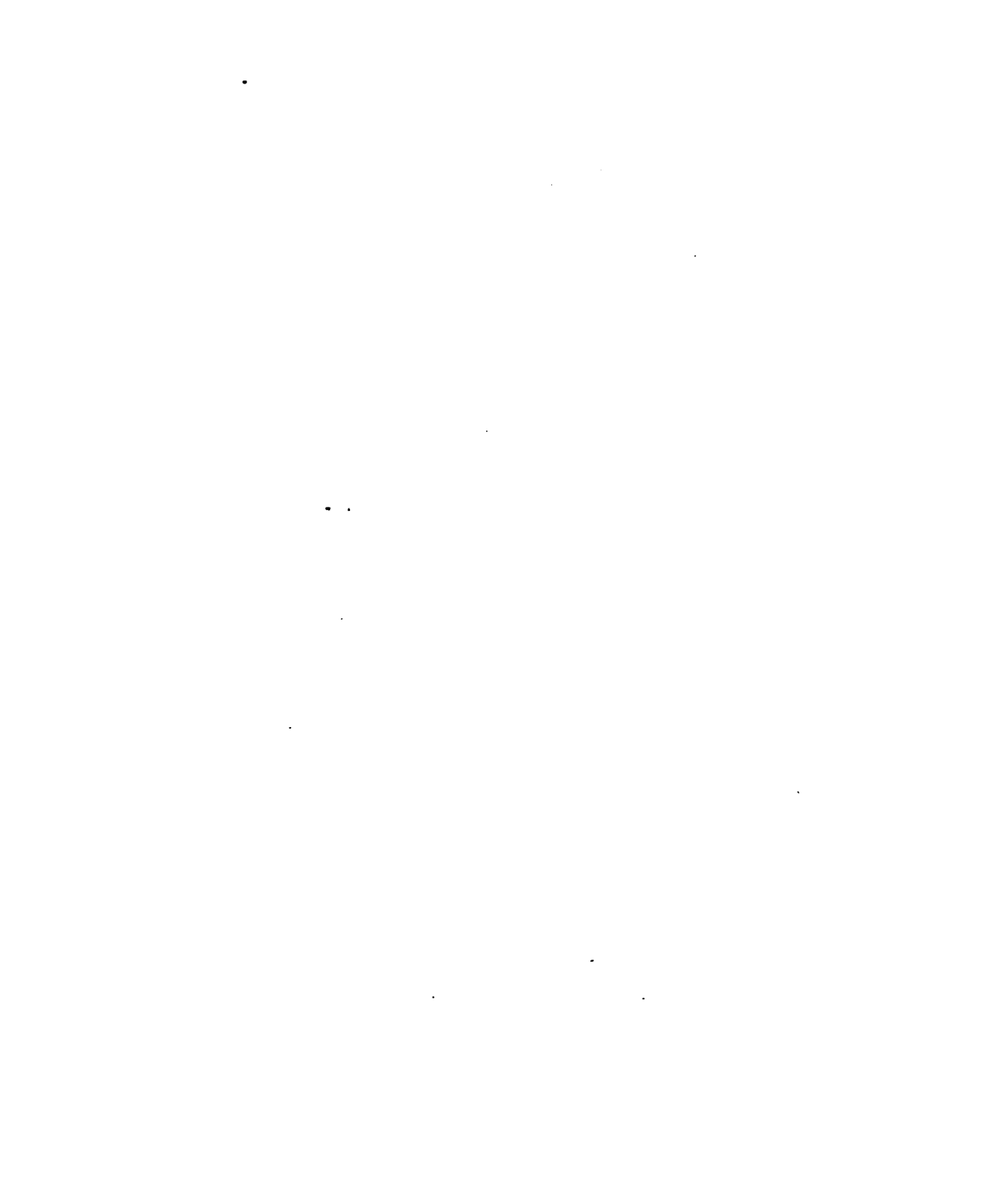
















THE  
Establishment and Development  
OF THE  
**SCHOOL SYSTEM**  
OF THE  
STATE OF NEW YORK

BY  
✓ THOMAS E. FINEGAN, P<sup>ED.</sup> D., LL.D.

Third Assistant Commissioner



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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction . . . . .	9
The schools of Holland . . . . .	10
Dutch settlers in America . . . . .	14
Early New York schools . . . . .	16
English influence on New York schools . . . . .	20
After the Revolution . . . . .	21
The first Common school . . . . .	25
The law of 1795 . . . . .	25
The law of 1812 . . . . .	27
The fight for Free schools . . . . .	33
The Public School Society . . . . .	47
Higher education . . . . .	50
Columbia university . . . . .	51
The Regents of the University . . . . .	52
Union free schools . . . . .	56
Equal education for girls . . . . .	59
School funds . . . . .	64
Training of Teachers . . . . .	68
Supervision . . . . .	73
Compulsory education . . . . .	76
The Empire State . . . . .	79

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## **The Establishment and Development of New York's School System**

The common school system of this state, whose permanent foundations were established by the Legislature in 1812, is now completing one hundred years of uninterrupted service. When the New York State Teachers Association was organized in 1845, the common school system had not yet won that universal support from the public which it now enjoys and which was essential to the fulfilment of the great service which the state intended such system should render. During the sixty-seven years of her history, this association has been an important agency not only in bringing popular support to the state system of

## 10 *Development of New York Schools*

public education but in influencing the development of that system so that it has been a powerful factor in developing the state's intellectual and cultural standards, in building up and maintaining her industrial and commercial supremacy, and in promoting the security and happiness of her people. It is therefore peculiarly fitting that this association should devote an evening to the consideration of the essential facts relating to the history of the origin of the common school system of this state, of the great struggle that ensued to make such schools free, and of the progress which has been made during the century of their existence.

### *The Schools of Holland*

New York was settled by the Dutch during the seventeenth century. Holland was a land of homes, orphanages, hospitals,



churches and schools. It was a land inhabited by a happy, contented, prosperous, thrifty, cultured, religious people. Fiske says that even the peasants of Holland could commonly read and write their own language. For a century or more public schools had been maintained in the cities, and a system of schools had been perfected in the closing years of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries which extended not only throughout the populous centres of that country but throughout the rural regions as well. This system of schools provided instruction not only for every boy but also for every girl in that land.

The schools of Holland were public schools and were maintained in accordance with regulations prescribed by the public authorities. They were under

## 12 *Development of New York Schools*

dualistic control, the church and the state, with the ecclesiastical influence predominating. Although tuition was generally charged for attendance upon these schools, they were nevertheless properly regarded as public schools. They were public schools in the sense that they were open to all children of the country, were supported in part by public taxation, and were in their management and control subject to the public authorities. The curriculum was simple, including reading, writing and religious instruction. Sometimes the elements of arithmetic were also taught. The civil authorities determined the books to be used, the qualifications of the teachers, and the general policy of the schools. They employed the teacher and paid his salary. Poor chil-

dren, upon request, were received without the payment of tuition.

In addition to these schools, several universities had been established, affording a system of higher education and exerting a mighty influence upon the life of the nation. Holland's men of trade and finance, of letters and science, her artists and inventors, her lawyers and statesmen were among the leaders of the world. Her army and navy recognized no superiors. Her people were men of honor and of high ideals. While they were generous and tolerant, they appreciated the value of their liberties and freedom and with firmness and courage protected and maintained them. No people of that period occupied a more commanding position throughout the world in industrial, commercial and financial



#### 14 *Development of New York Schools*

affairs. No country enjoyed the exercise of greater civil, political and religious liberties.

##### *Dutch settlers in America*

It was from a people of this character and these advantages and political experiences that the first settlers of New York came. They were therefore unlike the representatives of most nations that sought homes in the New World in the seventeenth century. They came to American shores, not because they were oppressed at home, not to avoid persecution, not to find a refuge where they might peaceably live in accordance with the dictates of their consciences, not as adventurers and plunderers, but they came on their own initiative to reap the advantages which their country's expanding commerce and the commercial opportuni-

ties of the times and conditions afforded.

Wherever the Dutch made settlements in America, they established schools and such schools were of the type of those which existed in Holland. In the creation of an institution, in their adopted country, which would have such a vital influence upon their happiness and liberties as the public school would have, it was natural that they should introduce the type of school which had been the bulwark of their freedom and civilization in the mother country. Of course, there was no organized government in the new land, and the governmental authority exercised in the Dutch settlements was that which Holland exercised through the West India Company. The government was vested in a supervisory body known as the Lord Directors and a director general and

16 *Development of New York Schools*

council who exercised such power as the Lord Directors conferred upon them.

*Early New York schools*

The school master was required to give religious instruction to all the children in his school. A catechism was used for this purpose. The course of study also included the "three R's". In view of the religious instruction required, the church authorities therefore examined and licensed the teachers, prescribed the catechism, approved the books used, and supervised the instruction to see that its requirements were satisfied.

The expense of the maintenance of the school was shared by the company at New Amsterdam and by the city. It appears that, in the Dutch villages, subscriptions, which were regarded as compulsory, were received and that an excise

revenue was available. There is evidence to support the statement that in some of these villages the company also contributed to the salary of the teacher. The teacher also received from each child a tuition fee which was fixed by the local public authorities. In accordance with the practice in Holland, poor children, upon request, were received without the payment of tuition.

The evidence is ample to show that the first school established by the Dutch was at New Amsterdam in 1633. This school was not only the first public school in New York but also the first upon American soil. This pioneer American school was maintained through the entire period of Dutch rule but, upon the advent of the second period of English rule in 1674, passed into the control of the Reformed

18 *Development of New York Schools*

Dutch Church of New York City and that institution has continued the maintenance of such school to the present time. This school has therefore had a continuous existence from 1633, or a period of nearly three centuries. The schools in some of the Dutch villages after the period of English control were continued as official schools and were under the direction of and supported by the local civil authorities. Elementary schools did not prosper during the century of English rule preceding the Revolution. The English could see only a menace to their power in maintaining schools for the Dutch. The entire educational record of the colony of New York for that century is restricted to three acts—two creating free Latin schools in New York and the other relating to appropriations from public revenues for

the support of Kings College, now Columbia University.

The leaders of the Dutch Church in America appear to have been unable to comprehend that America was destined to become the land of a great English-speaking people. They failed to realize the great opportunities that would come from uniting with the English authorities who controlled the municipalities to make provision for giving instruction in the schools in the English language as well as in the Dutch language. In this incident is a lesson from which we may profit today, and that is that public schools which fail to meet the educational necessities of the people are not performing the functions for which they are organized and maintained.

An examination of the general manage-

## 20 *Development of New York Schools*

ment of the schools during the forty years of Dutch rule will show that there was a gradual separation between the influence of the church and of the civil authorities and that this movement was toward the secular control of the schools. During the century following the rule of the Dutch, this movement gained great strength with the people and developed into an open opposition to the ecclesiastical control not only of the schools but of civil affairs generally.

### *English influence on New York Schools*

It is not to be assumed, however, that there were no schools during the rule of the English nor during the years immediately following the Revolution.

There were schools but they were either private schools, church schools, or charity schools. They were not generally in the

accepted meaning of that day public schools and were insufficient in number and in organization to provide proper facilities for the great majority of the children. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, a missionary society representing the Church of England, is entitled to recognition for its labor and particularly for its effort to promote the use of the English language.

*After the Revolution*

Immediately after the close of the Revolution, the subject of public education began to receive the attention of the foremost men of the country. In our own state, Clinton, Hamilton, Livingston, Jay and others advocated the adoption of means for the education of the masses. The British evacuated New York City in November 1783, and within two months



## 22 *Development of New York Schools*

thereafter the state legislature was in session and Governor Clinton was stating to that body in his official message that the most important subject for their consideration was the necessity of providing for the education of the youth of the state. In 1784 and within six months after the defeated British forces had marched from New York City, the law-making body of the state enacted two laws which have exerted a mighty influence in the development of New York's public school system. These were the act creating the University of the State of New York and the one to provide funds for the support of the schools. The first official statement setting forth the needs of a system of public schools came from the Board of Regents in 1787. A committee of that body of which Alexan-

der Hamilton and Ezra L'Hommedieu were members submitted a report which contained the following statement: "Your committee feels bound to add that the erecting of public schools for teaching reading, writing and arithmetic is an object of very great importance, which ought not to be left to the discretion of private men, but be promoted by public authority."

Governor Clinton in his annual messages continued to impress upon the Legislature the importance of providing elementary schools. The Board of Regents in their annual reports to the Legislature joined with Governor Clinton in setting forth the supreme need of establishing schools throughout the state. In their reports for 1793, 1794, and 1795, the Regents again took strong ground upon

this question and, in the latter year the Legislature responded favorably.

It may seem strange now that the Legislature acted with much deliberation upon a question of such pressing and momentous importance to the people. There was reason enough for such delay. The long struggle of the Revolution had impoverished the people; the population of the state was only 340,000; the expense of inaugurating a school system was a consideration at that day which properly made wise men cautious; there were those who believed that parents should meet the entire expense of the education of their children; there were those who were indifferent to the proposition; and there were others who were positively opposed not only to the state's assuming direction of public education but even to the idea

of educating the masses. Public sentiment, however, was fast ripening upon this question.

*The first Common school*

The first common school established in this state was at Clermont, Columbia county, in 1791. The Legislature authorized the use of the surplus excise revenue which was not needed to support the poor to purchase a site, erect a schoolhouse, and maintain a school. Chancellor Livingston was appointed a member of a commission to see that the act relating thereto was made effective.

*The law of 1795*

The Assembly of 1795 appointed a committee to consider that part of Governor Clinton's message which related to his recommendation on the establishment of a system of common schools. This

## 26 *Development of New York Schools*

committee reported a bill which became a law and was the beginning of the foundation on which the state school system was constructed. This law authorized an annual appropriation of fifty thousand dollars for a period of five years, to be apportioned to the localities which maintained schools. Each town was required to raise by taxation a sum equal to one-half the amount apportioned to it from the state fund. Localities were authorized to form associations for the purpose of maintaining schools and to elect two trustees to have charge of the general business affairs of the schools. The towns were required to elect from three to seven commissioners, who were given supervision and direction of the schools and the power to determine the qualifications

of teachers and to apportion the school funds.

This scheme had no general directory or supervisory force and no cohesive power within itself and therefore completely broke down. It appears that about fifteen hundred schools had been organized within the five years for which appropriations had been authorized and that as many as sixty thousand children attended them. They failed however to command sufficient respect and influence to induce the Legislature in 1800 to renew the appropriation for their support and were therefore generally discontinued in that year.

*The law of 1812*

Each year thereafter the Governor in his message and the friends of the schools who were in the Legislature pressed the issue to the front until the year 1811

when Governor Tompkins was authorized to appoint another committee to report to the Legislature the following year "a system for the organization and establishment of common schools". This committee gave the question most careful consideration. They evidently made an exhaustive study of the plans pursued in other countries and submitted to the Legislature of 1812 a report which forms one of the most important educational documents in the history of the state. The committee also submitted with its report the draft of a bill to carry into effect the recommendations made in its report. This bill was enacted into law by the Legislature of 1812. Its principal provisions were as follows:

- 1 The present plan of school districts was provided. The territory in each

town was divided into such districts by three commissioners chosen for this special purpose at the town meeting.

2 A complete and effective school organization was created in each district, consisting of three trustees, a collector and a clerk.

3 The principle that all teachers should possess moral character and certain scholastic qualifications was established and local officers known as town commissioners and inspectors were created to determine such qualifications and also to inspect the schools.

4 The office of state superintendent of common schools was created, being the first office of the kind to be established by any state in the Union. This officer was given sufficient directory and supervisory authority to initiate proceedings



### 30 *Development of New York Schools*

to set the machinery of each district into operation and the power to bind the schools together into one strong, aggressive force to accomplish the purposes for which the state created them.

5 Each district was required to provide a schoolhouse and site, to keep the building in repair, and to furnish necessary appendages and fuel. A tax could be laid upon the property of the district for this purpose.

6 Trustees were authorized to employ a teacher and fix his compensation.

7 The money apportioned to a district from the school funds could be used only in the payment of teachers' salaries.

These were the broad lines upon which the schools were to be conducted, and each of these general provisions has been continued in the management of our

schools system through the century which it is now completing. This fact is evidence of the wisdom and the keen vision which was possessed by our forefathers who constructed the machinery for the operation of an organization so vast in its importance, touching as it does the most cherished interests of every fireside in the commonwealth.

In addition to these provisions of the law there are certain important fundamental principles of state policy involved which should be briefly considered.

1 That public education was a state function and that public schools should be fostered and maintained under state supervision was determined.

2 That in the accomplishment of this purpose a state system of tax-supported schools should be established and officers

### 32 *Development of New York Schools*

chosen in the several localities to execute the state's policy in relation to public education.

3 That where the funds of the state go, the authority and supervision of the state must follow.

A comparison of the essential features of the school system adopted in 1812 with the school system developed in Holland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and also with the schools maintained in the Dutch villages of New York during the period of Dutch rule will reveal types of schools which are strikingly similar. There was, however, one predominant influence in the Holland and in the Dutch colonial schools which was absolutely eliminated in the system of 1812, and this was the ecclesiastical power. It will be observed that the

secular influence which had gained such great ground throughout the civilized world where the people were responsive to the influences of democracy was in complete control of the schools.

*The fight for Free schools*

There were three sources from which the necessary revenues for meeting the expenses of maintaining schools were derived: (1) the district imposed a tax for the expense of providing a schoolhouse, fuel, etc. and the tuition of indigent children; (2) the fund apportioned by the state, which was about twenty dollars for each district, was to be applied exclusively toward the payment of the salary of the teacher; (3) the balance necessary to meet the deficiency in the salary of the teacher was assessed upon the parents of the children who attended

### 34 *Development of New York Schools*

school. The children of the indigent were exempt from the payment of tuition. This assessment upon parents authorized in 1814 was the inauguration of what was known as the ratebill system.

This plan often placed a burden upon the poor which they were not able to meet. To avoid it, they must acknowledge that they were indigent. The tuition was then assumed by the district and entry of the payment thereof made in the public records. The children affected were therefore publicly branded as indigent children and the recipients of charity. The whole plan was repugnant to the proper spirit of democratic institutions in the dawn of the nineteenth century. It was doubtless an inheritance from Holland. In that country, during the seventeenth century, as we have already

observed, the poor children were admitted to school upon request without the payment of tuition. A similar plan prevailed in the Dutch schools in America. While the establishment of a system of common schools was an expression of the democracy which prevailed after the close of the Revolution, our democratic tendencies had not yet reached that development where human rights were always to be regarded as superior to property rights. We were not yet ready to adopt the principle that it is the obligation of the state to provide for the education of all its children.

This very question which seems so simple now was one of the most troublesome in the development of the public school system. It is probably within the truth to say that no other question

agitated the public mind to a greater extent and was a source of greater feeling among the people for so long a period of time. It was a subject of bitter controversy in the legislative halls of the state for over a half century before a solution was reached.

Until this issue was raised, the question had been the establishment of *common schools*. Now the question had become, Shall we have *free schools*? Shall the property of the state educate the children of the state? Special laws were enacted by the Legislature from year to year conferring upon cities and villages the privilege of voting upon the question of making the schools free and in every instance the proposition was adopted. Between 1842 and 1848, it was adopted in Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Poughkeepsie, Rochester,

Lansingburgh, Flushing, Newtown, Bushwick and Syracuse, and practically in Albany, Troy and Utica. These sections represented one-fourth of the population of the state. The honor of being the first city to adopt free schools belongs to New York.

The subject of free schools came before the constitutional convention of 1846. It received careful consideration by the committee on common schools and a great debate upon the proposition occurred upon the floor of the convention. On the day preceding final adjournment, the convention adopted a motion to submit to the people the proposition to incorporate in the Constitution a provision requiring the Legislature to provide funds for the maintenance of free schools throughout the state. This proposition was adopted



by a vote of 57 to 53. Unfortunately the convention adjourned for dinner. A device sometimes known as a caucus or a conference was understood even at this early period. One was held during the dinner hour and, when the convention reconvened, its previous action in voting to submit to the people the right to vote upon the adoption of a constitutional provision in favor of free schools was reconsidered by a vote of 61 to 27.

The question next came before the Legislature of 1849. A law was enacted in that year to establish free schools throughout the state. The proposition was submitted to the voters of the state to determine whether or not it should be adopted. Every county in the state except Chenango, Otsego and Tompkins gave favorable majorities and the state

gave an overwhelming majority of 157,921 in favor of free schools. This free school law also provided that boards of supervisors should levy upon their respective counties for school purposes a sum equal to the amount apportioned such counties by the state. This school fund was then apportioned among the towns and another tax upon the town equal to the amount apportioned to it was also assessed. The balance necessary to maintain the schools was to be collected by a tax upon the property of the school district.

The result of the election was not known until a majority of the boards of supervisors had adjourned. No county tax or town tax for school purposes was levied by these bodies in most counties. The entire expense of maintaining the schools fell upon the school district. The in-

40 *Development of New York Schools*

creased tax for school purposes was so pronounced that a hostile feeling to the law developed in all parts of the state. The Legislature of 1850 was flooded with petitions for the repeal of the law. The opponents of free schools set in motion every agency at their command to defeat the project. The friends of free schools were also alert. Assemblyman Burroughs of Orleans county came forward with a proposition to raise annually by state tax \$800,000 for the support of the schools. Those opposed to the principle of free schools would make no compromise and they possessed sufficient influence in the Legislature to pass a proposition submitting to the people the right to vote upon the repeal of the law. This measure passed the Assembly on the last day of the session and after midnight

when the pendulum of the clock had been stopped and the hands set at twelve.

The friends of free schools renewed their fight in behalf of the great principle for which they had fought for nearly fifty years. A state convention was held at Syracuse which was presided over by State superintendent Young and in which the people of the state were urged to oppose the repeal of the law, but the convention pledged its efforts to such amendments thereof as public sentiment demanded. The repeal of such law was defeated at the general election of 1850 by a majority of 25,038 votes and once again had the people of the state gone on record in support of free schools. Forty-two counties in the state, however, gave majorities in favor of the repeal of the law and outside of New York City

there was a clear majority in favor of such repeal. As reports came in from these counties, the eyes of the entire state were turned upon that great city, and she rolled up a majority of 38,000, which not only overcame the up-state vote but which forever preserved the free school system and scored a mighty victory in favor of democracy in public education.

The opponents of free schools pursued every possible avenue of attack upon the law and even instituted proceedings in the courts in four different counties to test its constitutionality. One of these cases reached the Court of Appeals and in June 1853 that court declared the law unconstitutional. This decision was based upon the form and procedure in the enactment of the law and not upon the power of the Legislature or the au-

thority of the people to provide free schools. The law was so drawn that its validity depended upon a majority of the votes being cast for its adoption and not upon the action of the Legislature. The court held that the constitution conferred on the Legislature the power to enact laws and that the Legislature could not divest itself of this responsibility and delegate that power to the people.

This decision of the court, however, had no vital bearing upon the establishment of free schools. In the campaign of 1850, involving the repeal of the free school act, the friends of that project recognized the inequality of taxation produced under the operation of that law and pledged their best efforts to correct the same by remedial legislation. The Legislature of 1851 in responding to this

#### 44 *Development of New York Schools*

demand authorized an appropriation of \$800,000 to be raised by direct taxation for the support of the schools and thus laid the foundation of the free school fund. In this law, the essential features of the free school act of 1849 were re-enacted. Under its provisions, the schools were declared to be free to every child in the state between the ages of five and twenty-one "except as herein provided". This exception was that, when state funds were insufficient to meet the salary of the teacher, the deficiency should be obtained by assessments upon the parents of the children who attended school. The old ratebill system was still continued.

The additional state aid extended to the schools did not relieve the poor from the burden of taxation for the education of their children which it had been antici-

pated such aid would afford. The country was growing, its business interests expanding, the simple life of the people was becoming more complex and the expense of maintaining schools was increasing in common with the increased expense of other affairs. The amount of tuition paid by parents under the ratebill system was increasing and amounted to about \$500,000 annually. The schools had become free in nearly all the cities and in many of the villages of the state. This tax was therefore paid by the people living in the farming sections.

The democracy of that age was taking new form. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had been issued. The great Civil War in the name of liberty, freedom and union had been fought. Human rights were obtaining increased recogni-



#### 46 *Development of New York Schools*

tion, human beings were regarded as more sacred than property, and in 1867 the Legislature abolished the old ratebill system, increased the annual appropriation for free schools and authorized a school-district tax for the maintenance of schools. The schools then really became *free schools* and the principle that all the property of the state should educate all the children of the state was definitely and finally asserted. The people of this generation find it difficult to believe that such a heroic fight was required in order to provide free schools, and yet our state was a leader in this great movement in the recognition of the people's rights. It was not until 1881 that the elementary schools of France were made absolutely free, and not until 1888 that

similar action was taken in Germany and not until 1891 in England.

*The Public School Society*

No review of the educational system of New York state would be complete without reference to the Public School Society of New York City. This society was organized in 1805, or seven years previous to the permanent organization of the state school system. It was later known as The Public School Society of New York and for nearly fifty years rendered a valuable service in promoting public education in that city. This society was a private corporation under the management of a board of trustees, many of whom were leading citizens of that city and among the foremost men of the country. DeWitt Clinton was the first president of the society and served

in that capacity until his death in 1828. There were many private schools in New York City which were attended by the children of the aristocratic and wealthy families. There were many other charitable and church schools, but the founders of this society knew that there were many children who had no opportunity to obtain an education. The object of this society was to provide educational facilities for these children and the scope of the work of the society was enlarged so that its function was to provide an education for all children in New York City not otherwise provided for and as defined in its charter "whether such children be or be not the proper objects of gratuitous education, and without regard to the religious sect or denomination to which such children or their parents may belong".

This society received voluntary contributions and appropriations were made to it by the city and by the state. It participated pro rata in the apportionment of the state school funds.

As the public school system developed, public sentiment became opposed to a private corporation's management of schools which were supported almost wholly from the public treasury. Popular opinion earnestly supported the idea that public authorities should control the public schools and, in 1842, the provisions of the common school law were extended to New York City and a board of education and the other necessary machinery for operating the schools of a city were created. In 1853, this society turned over to the city board of education seventy-eight

50 *Development of New York Schools*

schools and property to the value of nearly one-half million dollars.

*Higher education*

The growth and development of the country, the general advancement of the common intelligence of the people and the increased demands upon the social and commercial life of the state placed greater demands upon the state's system of public education than were provided by the common schools. The educational facilities afforded by the academies, which were institutions of secondary learning, were inadequate to these demands. Public sentiment developed until the proposition that the public schools should provide these additional educational facilities was strongly supported.

*Columbia university*

The task of tracing the forces which influenced the development of our system of elementary schools is comparatively easy, but that of determining the influences which affected the development and shaped our system of secondary and higher educational institutions is more difficult. Kings College, now Columbia University, was the first college organized in the state and was incorporated in 1754. A violent controversy occurred over the issuance of a charter to that college. One faction desired a charter granted by the colonial authorities and another desired one granted by the royal authorities. The influence of the royal party prevailed and the charter of Kings College was granted by King George II. It was, of course, an institution which represented

the aristocratic and ecclesiastic influences which were controlling elements in English affairs at that day. The fact, however, that there was a faction in the colony taking the position that the charter of this college should be granted by the colonial legislature is evidence that in 1754 there was abroad in the colony the germ of that intellectual, civil and religious freedom which asserted itself and became supreme in the Revolutionary period.

*The Regents of the University*

The legislation of 1784, creating the University of the state of New York, induced the friends of Kings College, which had been discontinued during the war, to undertake to revive that institution. The foremost men of the state were men who possessed strong attachments for English institutions. Paris, however, might well be

regarded as the world's intellectual center at that time. French soldiers and French capital had rendered material aid to the colonists in their struggle for freedom from English rule. Our leading men in science, literature and statesmanship had come in contact with the scholars and statesmen of France and had been students of the liberalizing movements which were in force throughout the world. While it can not be said that the plan of education contemplated under the University of the state of New York, created in 1784 and modified somewhat in 1787, was modelled after either the English or French systems of higher education, there are points of similarity which can be traced to the influences of these two countries. Nevertheless, there were no greater men in the state, and no firmer patriots in



the country, than those who participated in and were responsible for the organization of the Board of Regents — Clinton, Hamilton, Jay, Duane, Livingston and others. In the final analysis, however, of the motives and influences which determined the character and policy of this great educational measure, it must be held that the dominating power was the prevailing spirit throughout America as expressed not only in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, but also in the several state constitutions, that the people desired self-government and political freedom and would support no scheme of public education which, in their judgment, was not a guarantee of the preservation and development of these principles. The influences therefore which were vital

in the creation of the University of the state of New York and which were controlling in the development of our system of secondary and higher education were characteristically American.

The Regents were charged with the duty of incorporating academies and colleges. From the creation of the University in 1784 to the year 1812, when a permanent elementary state school system was organized, the Regents had chartered thirty academies. Three colleges, Columbia, Union and Hamilton had also been chartered. The Regents rendered a great service to the state and to public education in exercising such discriminating judgment in passing upon applications for charters. Several applications for college charters were denied but charters for academies were granted instead. Many applications to

incorporate academies were denied. These charters were granted as public necessities demanded and as petitioners showed their ability to organize and maintain the institutions on proper financial and educational standards.

*Union free schools*

The year 1853 is an important period in the development of secondary schools. At the close of the fifties, there were about one hundred ninety academies operating throughout the state. The growth of these institutions had been gradual and substantial up to this period. From this period there has been a gradual decrease and many have been merged into the public school system. In 1853, the Legislature enacted the union free school law. The object of this law was to consolidate the separate districts of a city, or two or

more districts contiguous to each other in the villages of the state, so that more property and a greater number of children should be brought to the support of a single school. This action enabled school authorities to liberalize their courses of study and to provide the necessary equipment and teachers for giving instruction therein. Such districts were authorized to organize academic departments and were later authorized to take over under contract academies located in the district. These districts were also authorized to organize high schools. The terms "academic course" and "high school course" became synonymous.

These departments in the public schools were tax-supported institutions and therefore became powerful rivals of the academies in all parts of the state. The rise of

the public high schools until they number about nine hundred in the state has caused the decline of the old academy until that class of institution is nearly extinct. These public high schools and many of the one hundred seventy private secondary schools offer not only the traditional college preparatory course but also commercial courses, agricultural courses, manual training and technical courses for boys, and domestic art and science and home-making courses for girls. In other words, these institutions bring within the reach of every boy and girl in the state a technical training which will prepare them for the special field of labor which they desire to pursue.

The men of liberal education throughout the history of modern times have been the champions of national progress and of

individual liberty and freedom. These men have constituted the influence and power in all large movements in this country and abroad intended to accomplish these results. The more vast and intricate the affairs of the nation become, the greater the need of an increased number of men of large vision and intellectual power. The number of such men depends very generally upon the character of the institutions of secondary and higher education. The policy of the state therefore in fostering these institutions from an early date and in extending them generous financial assistance has been one of prudence, wisdom and patriotism.

*Equal education for girls*

There has been one feature in the development of the public school system of the state from its beginning which has dis-

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tinguished it from the plan of education which has been pursued in other states and in other countries. We adopted the policy of our Dutch ancestors by providing that the elementary schools should be open to the girls of the state upon the same conditions under which they were open to the boys. Writers of educational history tell us that the doors of the public schools of Boston were barred against the girls of that city until 1790, when Boston began to regard the girls sufficiently to admit them to school during the summer months when the attendance was low because the boys would not attend at that time of the year. It is further asserted by these writers that the records show that in 1788 Northampton, Mass., voted that girls were unworthy of an education and that such town would tolerate no expense for "schooling girls".

This state has always accorded girls equal privileges with the boys not only in the elementary schools but also in the secondary schools, and has manifested a keen interest in affording adequate provision for the higher education of women.

Some writers have credited Derry, New Hampshire, with the honor of having organized in 1823 the first academy in this county designed solely for girls. These writers are attempting to rob the state of New York of one of her most notable achievements in public education. In 1819, or four years previous to the organization of the Derry academy, Mrs. Emma Willard opened the Waterford Female Academy. She continued this institution until 1821 when she moved that academy to Troy and founded the Troy Female Seminary, which was later named the



## 62 *Development of New York Schools*

Emma Willard School in honor of its distinguished founder. The citizens of Troy provided a commodious building for that institution in 1821. Although this institution was not legally chartered until 1837, it has had a continuous existence devoted solely to the education of girls since 1819. The Albany Female Academy was chartered by the Legislature in 1821, or two years before the Derry school was opened, and has been in continuous operation from that date. The Emma Willard School is the oldest *organized* institution in the country, if not in the world, devoted solely to the secondary education of girls, and the Albany Female Academy is the oldest *chartered* institution in the country, if not in the world, devoted to the secondary education of girls. These two pioneer institutions which projected

their activities in this line of public education have therefore brought distinction and honor upon the Empire state. But more than this, the Elmira Female College was the first college in the world devoted to the education of women which organized courses of study on an equal footing with the courses which obtained in the colleges of the country for the education of men.

The founders of the public school system of the state were guided by such wisdom and statesmanship that they comprehended the wide range of activities which would open to the women of the country and the great benefits which would come not only to society but to the state itself through their proper education. As a result of New York's policy of providing equal privileges in her public schools for boys and girls, there are today more girls

64 *Development of New York Schools*

in attendance upon the secondary and higher educational institutions of the state than there are boys in attendance upon such institutions.

*School funds*

Of course the establishment of a system of public education depended in a large degree upon financial support and we have seen that the first action of the state toward a permanent state fund to be devoted to the support of public education was the enactment of a law directed to such purpose in 1784. The state possessed large tracts of unappropriated public lands. The law provided that these lands should be divided into townships of six miles square and that in each town three hundred acres should be set apart for the support of a minister of the Gospel and six hundred ninety for the support of a

public school. This law was the origin of the gospel and school fund. From this fund, the schools obtained very substantial assistance in the earlier history of the state and it still renders slight aid to the schools in about one-half of the counties.

Another fund, known as the literature fund, was established in 1786 through the sale of state lands. Various additions to this fund have been made since that date. The revenues have been expended under the direction of the Regents in extending aid to the academies of the state and other institutions which have been under the supervision of the Regents. The capital of this fund is about \$284,000.

The establishment of these funds, however, was the initial action of a state policy. It established the principle that

the state should give financial support to the maintenance of public schools. Out of the action creating these funds came the action which resulted in the establishment of a larger fund and one which has given greater support to the schools, namely, the common school fund. This support came at a time when the schools were in their greatest need of financial assistance and the aid thereby rendered was undoubtedly more effective and serviceable than the state aid accorded the schools at any other time in their history. This fund was created in 1805 from the net proceeds of the sale of 500,000 acres of state land. There could be no distribution of this fund until the annual revenue amounted to \$50,000. The first distribution was made in 1815 and one has been made annually since that date. The

amount of this fund is over four million seven hundred seventy-three thousand dollars. The creation of these funds for the support of the schools was the cornerstone in the foundation of the greatest school fund which has been created by any state in the Union. The outcome of that great contest for the establishment of free schools in this state, which extended through one-half of the nineteenth century, rested upon the creation of a permanent state fund which would give to localities substantial aid in meeting the expense of maintaining schools. This fund was authorized by the imposition of a direct tax in 1851 when the first free school law became operative and the amount raised and distributed among the several schools was \$800,000. This

amount has been increased from time to time and in 1912 was \$5,175,000.

To include all funds which have aided the development of the system of public education, mention should be made of the United States deposit fund. In 1836, Congress divided certain surplus revenues in the treasury among the several states for safe-keeping. New York state received about \$4,000,000. The Legislature directed that the revenue from this fund should be used for the support of the schools and from 1838 to 1881 it yielded annually for that purpose \$165,000 and since that time, because of depreciation in investments, only \$75,000.

*Training of teachers*

In all the laws enacted by the state in the development of its public school system, the teacher has been recognized

as an important factor. The right to teach in a public school during the entire history of the state has been predicated upon character and educational qualifications. Governor DeWitt Clinton in his message to the Legislature in 1819 urged upon that body the need of providing facilities for the professional training of the teachers who were to be employed in the public schools. He brought the subject to the attention of the Legislature repeatedly and in 1825 recommended the establishment of a "seminary for the education of teachers". The Regents gave the Governor most cordial and helpful support in his efforts in this direction by recommending in several reports that special provision for training teachers be made. The Legislature also gave the subject most careful consideration, but



the opinion of that body appears to have been that the condition of the state treasury at that time would not permit the state to undertake a proposition involving such additional expense.

It also appears to have been the opinion of the Legislature that the results desired to be accomplished through this special seminary could be achieved through the co-operation of the academies, which were then in a rather prosperous condition. The academies were already furnishing teachers for the common schools and, although special courses for teachers were not maintained, these institutions were somewhat imbued with the professional spirit and were giving instruction in the "principles of teaching". The literature fund was increased in 1827 and one of the stated objects was to "promote the

education of teachers". In 1834, a law was enacted directing that the revenue of the literature fund apportioned to academies should be expended in the education of teachers for common schools. This law gave the Regents the authority to prescribe regulations to govern such instruction. This early consideration of the subject shows that New York state had anticipated one of the greatest needs of the public school service and in advance of every state in the Union. She was the first American state to enact a law providing for the professional training of public school teachers. This law was the foundation of the present system of training classes, which is supplying annually about one thousand teachers for the rural schools.

The inadequacy, however, of this prepa-

ration for the teachers employed in the more advanced schools was soon recognized. Interest was again centered upon a more thorough and advanced system of professional instruction of teachers and developed into the establishment of the state normal school at Albany in 1844. The organization of this school was the beginning of the development of an extensive system of state normal and city training schools. There have been established ten state normal schools and thirteen city training schools devoted solely to the professional training of teachers for the elementary schools of the state, supplying annually about two thousand teachers. The original normal school established at Albany has become the State Normal College and is engaged in the training of teachers for the secondary schools of the state.

*Supervision*

From the very inception of the organization of a state school system, the state has recognized the value of the proper supervision of its schools. In the early act of 1795 provision was made for commissioners and inspectors who were charged with the general supervision of the schools in their respective towns. Similar provision was made in the permanent act of 1812 and, from that time to the present, supervision by local officers under the direction of the state has been maintained over the public schools either through inspectors, deputy state superintendents, county superintendents, town superintendents, school commissioners, or district superintendents, and city and village superintendents.

As separate organizations developed for the management of the schools in the populous centers, the necessity of professional direction of educational work in such centres was recognized. The city which has the honor of being the first not only in the state but in the United States to select a city superintendent of schools, is Buffalo, whose hospitality has been showered upon us during this meeting.

The state was apportioning large sums of money to the cities for the support of schools and regarded it important that these schools should be brought to the highest possible degree of efficiency. As early as 1864 the state gave encouragement to the proper supervision of schools in the cities by making an apportionment of state funds to the extent of \$500 for each member of Assembly to which a

city was entitled if the city employed a superintendent of schools. In 1876 the state extended this policy by including villages of 5,000 or more inhabitants and today we have in the cities, villages and supervisory districts 300 superintendents. It should be a source of congratulation to the people of the state to know that in no other state or country is there to be found a body of officers charged with the important work of giving direction to the education of its future citizens so well equipped from the standpoint of education, professional training and experience, or rendering a more vital service to public education, as the body of superintendents who are employed in supervising the schools of the state of New York. This has been a wise policy on the part of the state because it gives intelligent direction

to its educational activities, provides more efficient instruction, prevents waste of public funds and, what is of greater importance, a waste of the child's time.

*Compulsory education*

The declared policy of the state that public education was a state function, that public policy required the maintenance of public schools and the extension of public school work so as to include modern high school courses, and the further action of the state in making all these educational facilities free to every child in the Commonwealth, inevitably meant that the authority of the state would be exercised to compel children to attend school. If the welfare of society and of the state depended upon the dissemination of education among all classes and in all sections of the state, and if the

state possessed the legal authority to tax the property of all its citizens for the accomplishment of this result, then surely the state possessed like authority to compel the children who are to become its future citizens and upon whom its welfare in the future depends, to attend upon the instruction provided for them. Soon after the enactment of the free school law of 1867, the agitation of compulsory attendance laws began and in 1874 the first of these laws was enacted in this state. As might be expected, the original statute enacted to accomplish such purpose was cumbersome, was fundamentally wrong in its construction and therefore its provisions were never properly enforced. However, as the people began to understand the prevailing extent of illiteracy, the public conscience



became aroused at this menace to society and the sentiment of the state not only supported the enactment of stringent attendance laws but the rigid enforcement of such laws. This feeling throughout the state resulted in the enactment of the compulsory attendance act of 1894 and in various amendments thereto since that date until the present law, which not only promulgates the right of the child to receive an education but which also declares the obligation of the state to protect and guarantee such right of the child, is the most effective in this country. The effect of this law was immediate and has been manifested in two ways. First, the attendance of enrolled pupils has increased. When this law was enacted in 1894, the average daily attendance upon the public schools

of the state was 64 per cent of all the pupils enrolled in such schools. The average daily attendance at present is about 80 per cent of the enrolled pupils, or a gain of nearly 16 per cent. Second, there has also been a gradual decrease in the number of illiterates in the state between the ages of ten and fourteen years. Between 1890 and 1900 there was a decrease of 53 per cent in this class of illiterates throughout the state, and between 1900 and 1910 there was a decrease of 45 per cent.

*The Empire State*

Such in brief is a general review of a century of development and progress in public education in New York state. It has not been possible to consider the kindergarten, the private schools, the school and public libraries, nor the facilities for

the education of the orphan, the deaf, the blind, the crippled children, the feeble-minded, the illiterate criminals in the state penal institutions nor the Indian children upon the state reservations. These special fields of education have received the attention and financial support of the state and the state has thereby reflected her broad, comprehensive interest in human affairs.

Since 1800 our state has grown from a people of 340,000 to an empire of 10,000,000 human souls or about one-tenth of the population of the entire country. From the rank of fifth in the sisterhood of states in population, wealth, manufactures and commerce, she has risen to first place and acquired the title "Empire State".

During this same period of the state's commercial and industrial development and growth, her system of public education has risen step by step from the feeble beginnings of 1812, meeting each new demand, until today there are within the state 12,000 public elementary schools, 900 public high schools, 175 private secondary schools and 125 institutions of higher learning, which are attended by 2,000,000 students who are under the instruction and training of 54,000 teachers, at an annual expenditure of nearly \$80,000,000 and operated on an invested capital of \$365,000,000.

These institutions are the instruments of mighty power in eliminating the forces which are destructive of social and national progress and greatness. In them are trained for citizenship not only the children

82 *Development of New York Schools*

of American parentage and customs but associated with these are armies of thousands upon thousands of boys and girls of foreign birth, customs and languages, representing all the nations of the earth. They are prepared to enter the various activities of our commercial, industrial and professional life and generally become good American citizens. This record of progress, this achievement of unquestioned success of New York state in training her citizens, and the ready adaptability of the whole school system to meet the ever-changing needs of the people is sufficient answer to the frequent and unfounded indictment that the American public school system is a failure.

Fellow teachers, this work which has been accomplished by the schools for the moral, social and intellectual advance-

ment of society and the state is *your* achievement. In every great movement to make the schools more serviceable to the people, the progressive teachers of the country have been the leaders and their demands for the inauguration of reforms have been in advance of popular opinion necessary to their adoption. In the movement of the present decade to readjust the work of the schools to make them meet more completely and efficiently the needs of the great majority of children by the introduction of industrial education in the public schools, those charged with the management of the schools have been the leaders. You should feel a just pride in the contribution which you have made toward the success of our public school work. You should not be satisfied however with present achieve-

